



MEMORANDUM

TO: House Conservation and Outdoor Recreation Committee

FROM: National Wildlife Federation

DATE: May 26, 2003

RE: **Support for HB-4071, Sportsmen Against Hunger Bill**

Introduction:

The National Wildlife Federation is a non-profit conservation organization representing 38,000 members along with 179,000 activists and financial supporters. These comments are written in support of HB-4071 Sportsmen Against Hunger Bill. Voluntary wild game donation programs around the country have made tremendous contributions towards feeding the nation's hungry as well as produce an increasingly important wildlife management tool. This legislation will provide the needed financial support for Michigan to become a leader in using renewable natural resources to help it's citizens in need.

Social Need

Growing National Issue:

Virtually every national homeless, poverty, and hunger statistic in America is currently increasing, some by over 10% per year. We now have over 34 million Americans living below the poverty level with more than 23 million seeking emergency hunger relief services. This represents almost 12% of Americans.

Our collective mental image of "the needy" has become a scraggly faced, middle aged man who has given up in the land of opportunity. This image helps us validate our apathy and ignore a substantial and growing social issue. The reality is that more and more of these numbers include educated individuals, entire families classified as "working poor" and children. This new, more sobering image represents millions of Americans that have not yet had a chance, in our land of opportunity.

Who are the Americans in need?

- 1 in 8 children under the age of 12 in the United States goes to bed hungry every night
- Over 13 million American children reside in food insecure households
- 39% of families receiving emergency hunger relief have one or more adults currently employed
- 63% of emergency food recipients high a high school education or higher
- The poverty rate for suburban residents has steadily increased to over 13 million

Repeated episodes of inadequate food energy intake leads to cumulative, long-term learning deficits, lower academic achievement, higher rates of school failure, and even mental impairment. The single most challenging item for emergency hunger relief organizations to obtain is meat source protein. The average donated deer provides 200 meals, usually replacing peanut butter as the family's only potential protein source.

Science Need

The growing social need for healthy, cost effective protein sources comes at a time when the deer populations in many States has grow to exceed desired biological caring capacity. America's deer population has increased by 70% in the past 10 years to more than 34 million. Management of these excess populations through traditional regulated harvest has become problematic in many areas due to a gradual but continued trend of less hunters combined with a historic hunter ethic of only harvesting enough meat for their family's needs.

Michigan Sportsmen Against Hunger (MSAH)

Created in 1991, MSAH works to create a link between sportsmen, meat processors and the charities that feed the hungry in Michigan. It is a completely volunteer based organization, with no paid staff person. The program involves hunters donating legally harvested game. These donations include either entire carcasses or a portion of the processed meat. All donations are ground into burger and distributed to a variety of local shelters and kitchens. The average whitetail deer provides 200 healthy, high protein servings. MSAH is currently providing an average of 50,000 lbs. of wild game annually. Founding Organizations include, MUCC, Safari Club International, Ted Nugent United Sportsmen Of America, United Methodist Men, Michigan Bow Hunters Association, Michigan DNR, Food Bank Council of Michigan.

The Food Bank Council of Michigan acts as a solicitor, storehouse and distributor of food on behalf of its members (Red Cross, Salvation Army, church pantries, ect...). They represent 15 food banks around the state and is active in every Michigan county.

Other current MSAH member organizations include

- Farmers and Hunters Feeding the Hungry
- White Tails Unlimited
- Michigan Department of Agriculture

Program Constraints

Recent research conducted by National Wildlife Federation found that the top 2 constraints to program growth around the country are funding and marketing. Most groups spend an inordinate amount of time soliciting funds to cover processing fees for existing volumes. State volunteer organizations such as MSAH are left with no time and financial resources to expand programs through basic marketing efforts.

States that have broken through these resource constraints have produced quantum leaps in program volumes. Leading examples include neighboring **Wisconsin with more than 500,000 lbs in 2004, nearly 10 times the program results of Michigan.** These states attribute their initial growth momentum to the voluntary donations by sportsmen when buying licenses. Other states that have also passed legislation authorizing the license donation program include Maryland, Kansas, and New York. These states are all showing dramatic increases in program volumes.

Michigan is one of the leading States for license sales with more than 2 million hunting and fishing licenses sold last year as well as the highest annual deer harvest in the nation. MSAH provides the existing structure and demonstrated capacity to grow Michigan into the leading program in the country for feeding the hungry.